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FM THE SITUATION ROOM//TOHAK 17//

TO ADAMS FOR THE SECRETARY

UNCLAS VIA BLACK PATCH WH51103

TOHAK 17

VIETNAM

BY MCGEORGE BUNDY

AUSTIN, TEX. -- IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE EXTRAORDINARILY SUDDEN DISINTEGRATION OF RESISTANCE TO COMMUNISM IN INDOCHINA, THE LEADERS OF OUR GOVERNMENT HAVE REPEATEDLY CALLED UPON US ALL TO AVOID RECRIMINATION AND TO WORK FOR A NATIONAL RECONCILIATION. THIS APPEAL IS RIGHT, AND THERE HAS BEEN ENCOURAGING EVIDENCE IN RECENT DAYS THAT IN SOME MEASURE IT IS BEING HEARD.

PART OF THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING IS SIMPLY THAT LARGE AND PAINFUL EVENTS, UNLESS THEY ARE CLOSELY STUDIED, HAVE A HABIT OF TEACHING US THE WRONG LESSONS. IT IS OFTEN SAID THAT THE BESETTING WEAKNESS OF GENERALS IS THAT THEY PREPARE FOR THE LAST WAR. ONE MIGHT ADD THAT THOSE WHO SEEK TO PRESERVE OR RESTORE PEACE CAN MAKE THE SAME MISTAKE. TO MAKE THE PEACE OF THE FUTURE, MEN WILL ALWAYS NEED MORE THAN THE TOOLS OF THE PAST. THERE IS EVIDENCE OF BOTH OF THESE KINDS OF MISTAKES IN THE HISTORY OF OUR INVOLVEMENT IN VIETNAM, AND UNLESS THAT EXPERIENCE ITSELF IS CORRECTLY UNDERSTOOD, WE COULD WELL FIND OURSELVES APPLYING TO OTHER SITUATIONS ATTITUDES DRAWN MORE FROM UNEXAMINED FEELINGS ABOUT VIETNAM THAN FROM ITS REALITIES.

IT IS TRUE THAT THE INTENSE FEELINGS AROUSED BY THE WAR HAVE OFTEN BEEN A HANDICAP TO THOUGHT. ON THE EVIDENCE SO FAR AVAILABLE IN THE BOOKSTORES, FULL UNDERSTANDING IS NOT LIKELY TO COME INSTANTLY EITHER FROM EMBATTLED PARTICIPANTS OR FROM ANGRY CRITICS. YET EVEN IN THESE EARLY BOOKS THERE IS MUCH IMPORTANT RAW MATERIAL FOR LATER JUDGMENT AND MUCH EVIDENCE THAT IT WILL BE BEST FOR US TO UNDERSTAND THIS HISTORY.

***** WHSR COMMENT *****

MCFARLANE, RODMAN, SEC FLE

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PSN:034642

PAGE 01

TOR:180/20:00Z

DTG:291837Z JUN 75

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IN PARTICULAR IT WOULD BE INAPPROPRIATE FOR THOSE LIKE ME, WHO HAVE HAD A RESPONSIBLE CONNECTION WITH EARLIER PARTS OF THE WAR, TO BE RESISTANT TO SUCH AN EFFORT AT UNDERSTANDING. THERE HAVE BEEN GOOD REASONS FOR RETICENCE EARLIER, AS ONE HOPED AGAINST HOPE FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE EFFORTS OF OTHERS, ESPECIALLY OF THOSE UNSUNG VIETNAMESE WHO DID PERSIST ON THE SIDE OF LIBERTY. BUT NOW THAT CHAPTER HAS ENDED, AND WHO CAN KNOW MORE SURELY THAN THOSE OF US WHO TRIED THAT SOMEWHERE, SOMEHOW, THE UNITED STATES COULD HAVE DONE BETTER? WHO CAN HAVE A GREATER INTEREST IN HELPING AS FAR AS POSSIBLE TO SEE THAT THE LESSONS OF THIS HARD HISTORY ARE LEARNED?

NOW AT THE RISK OF STATING A CONCLUSION WITHOUT ITS FULL HISTORICAL ARGUMENT, LET ME SUGGEST TO YOU THAT THERE IS AT LEAST ONE GREAT LESSON ABOUT VIETNAM WHICH DESERVES TO BE LEARNED AND UNDERSTOOD BY ALL OF US JUST AS SOON AS POSSIBLE: IT IS THAT THE CASE OF VIETNAM IS UNIQUE. IT DOES NOT MAKE SENSE TO SET AS A CENTRAL OBJECTIVE THE REDESIGN OF OUR FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY SO AS TO AVOID "ANOTHER VIETNAM." THE WORLD IS SO SHAPED, GEOGRAPHICALLY, POLITICALLY, AND HISTORICALLY, THAT THE PARTICULAR SET OF CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH LED TO THE AMERICAN ROLE IN VIETNAM IS MOST UNLIKELY TO BE REPEATED.

A SECOND GREAT LESSON OF VIETNAM-A FAMILIAR ONE ALREADY-IS THE IMMENSE COST OF A BREAKDOWN IN RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS. THERE IS MUCH ROOM FOR DEBATE AS TO THE CAUSES OF THIS GRADUAL AND PROGRESSIVE BREAKDOWN, AND PROBABLY NO ADMINISTRATION OR CONGRESS OVER THE LAST TWENTY YEARS WILL BE HELD HARMLESS BY HISTORY, BUT SURELY THE MOST DRAMATIC EPISODE OF ALL IS THE CASE OF MR. NIXON'S SWEEPING SECRET ASSURANCE TO PRESIDENT THIEU, AS PART OF THE PRICE OF THIEU'S AGREEMENT TO THE PARIS ACCORDS OF JANUARY 1973, THAT THE ARMED FORCES OF THE UNITED STATES WOULD NOT STAND IDLY BY IN THE EVENT OF RENEWED LARGE-SCALE MILITARY ACTION BY HANOI.

THERE IS NO REASON TO DOUBT THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE TEXTS REVEALED ON APRIL 30 BY A FORMER ASSISTANT TO PRESIDENT THIEU, AND THEIR LANGUAGE IS EXPLICIT, NOTABLY THAT OF JAN. 5, 1973: "YOU HAVE MY ASSURANCE OF CONTINUED ASSISTANCE IN THE POST-SETTLEMENT PERIOD AND THAT WE WILL RESPOND WITH FULL FORCE SHOULD THE SETTLEMENT BE VIOLATED BY NORTH VIETNAM." NOR NEED WE DOUBT THAT THIS ASSURANCE OF "FULL FORCE," COMING JUST AFTER THE CHRISTMAS BOMBING OF HANOI, WAS UNDERSTOOD TO MEAN A READINESS TO RESORT ONCE AGAIN TO THIS KIND OF ACTION OR TO ACTION LIKE THE 1972 MINING OF HAIPHONG HARBOR.

THIS IS NOT THE PLACE TO ASSESS IN DETAIL THE REASONS WHY MR. NIXON MAY HAVE FELT IT RIGHT TO GIVE THIS "FULL FORCE" ASSURANCE. NOR IS NOW THE TIME TO EXAMINE THE SHALLOW PRETENSE THAT THE

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PAGE 02

TOR:180/20:00Z

DTG:291837Z JUN 75

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PEOPLE AND THE CONGRESS REALLY KNEW ABOUT IT AT THE TIME. WHAT WE HAVE TO NOTE HERE IS SIMPLY THAT A PRESIDENT GAVE A SWEEPING AND SOLEMN ASSURANCE OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO A LONGTIME ALLY, THAT HE DID NOT TELL CONGRESS WHAT HE HAD DONE, AND THAT SCARCELY SIX MONTHS LATER HIS ADMINISTRATION FOUND ITSELF FORCED TO ACCEPT A FIRM AND OBVIOUSLY FINAL LEGISLATIVE PROHIBITION AGAINST ANY SUCH RENEWED USE OF FORCE IN INDOCHINA.

I REGRET TO SAY THAT UNLIKE THE VIETNAM WAR AS A WHOLE, WHOSE REPETITION I HAVE CALLED UNLIKELY, THERE IS EVERY REASON FOR CONCERN ABOUT REPETITION, AND EVEN INTENSIFICATION, OF THE BREAKDOWN BETWEEN CONGRESS AND THE EXECUTIVE. THIS IS NOT A ONE-SIDED PROBLEM, AND IT IS NOT A NEW ONE, BUT IT SEEMS PAINFULLY CLEAR THAT TODAY IT IS ACUTE. AND WITHOUT DENYING THE EXTRAORDINARY DIFFICULTY OF MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE CONNECTION WITH A CONGRESS WHICH HAS LARGELY LOST ITS OWN TRADITIONAL TRUST IN RELEVANT COMMITTEES AND VISIBLE LEADERS, ONE MUST REMARK THAT A SELF-DEFEATING PREDILECTION BOTH FOR SECRECY AND FOR PERSONALISM HAS MARKED THE RECENT CONDUCT OF OUR DIPLOMACY.

IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THERE IS NOW A SEVERE IMBALANCE BETWEEN THE EXPECTATIONS THAT OTHERS HAVE OF OUR OBLIGATIONS TO DO THINGS THAT ARE IN THEIR INTEREST AND OUR OWN VIEW OF THE SAME MATTERS. THERE MAY BE A REAL CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE, FOR EXAMPLE, IN KOREA, WHERE OUR HISTORIC OBLIGATION IS OPEN, EXPLICIT, AND UNDERLINED BY THE PRESENCE OF TROOPS, AND WHERE THE ENERGY AND DETERMINATION OF THE PEOPLE ON THE SPOT ARE SO DIFFERENT FROM WHAT WE EVER FOUND IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

THE MORAL HERE IS NOT A NEW ONE, BUT ITS URGENCY IS NOW GREATER THAN EVER BEFORE. SINCE OUR VERY SIZE AND STRENGTH MUST LEAD OTHERS TO TEND TO RELY ON US FOR WHAT THEY WANT, IT BECOMES CRITICALLY IMPORTANT FOR US TO DETERMINE, AND FOR THEM TO UNDERSTAND, JUST HOW MUCH OF THE RELIANCE IS JUSTIFIED.

WE CANNOT DENY OUR FAILURES, WHETHER IN VIETNAM OR ELSEWHERE, NOR IS SUCH DENIAL IN THE NATIONAL TRADITION. WE CANNOT DENY- INDEED WE MUST STRONGLY AFFIRM- OUR LIMITATIONS. WE CANNOT AND WILL NOT DO EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE, AND WE CAN DO NOTHING, ANYWHERE, THAT IS NOT MATCHED BOTH TO THE DESIRES AND THE EFFORTS OF THOSE WHO TURN TO US. NOR CAN WE DENY-WE MUST LOUDLY PROCLAIM- THAT WE ARE A PEOPLE OF GREAT DIVERSITY. OUR DECISIONS WILL NEVER BE MONOLITHIC, AND NO ONE, NOT EVEN OUR PRESIDENTS, CAN EVER SPEAK FOR US ALL, BUT WE ARE THE SAME PEOPLE THAT IN A GENERATION HAVE TWICE HELPED SAVE THE FREEDOM OF EUROPE, THAT HAVE BEEN FIRST AMONG THE NATIONS IN THE STRUGGLE TO WARD OFF WORLDWIDE NUCLEAR CATASTROPHE, THAT HAVE SHOWN OURSELVES READY TO RESPOND, TIME AFTER TIME, TO LEADERSHIP THAT APPEALS TO OUR PRACTICAL GENEROSITY.

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PAGE 03

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